

## ARTICLE

## Humanist formation the role of literary reading in the performance of the school librarian

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Literary reading is considered one of the most relevant activities for the improvement of interpersonal skills, such as empathy, considered essential in performing the functions of the school librarian. **Objective:** Thus, this study aims to discuss how the practice of literary reading can influence the performance of the school librarian from the perspective presented by the author Carlos Ruiz Zafón in the plot of his work *A Sombra do Vento*. **Method:** Regarding methodological procedures, this is a qualitative research, which had as scientific method the use of bibliographic research and the questionnaire as a data collection instrument. **Results:** The results show that librarians are aware of the importance of literary reading for the performance of their professional activities and for the construction of a more empathic and humanistic relationship with students, but this practice is not often discussed frequently in research in the area and encouraged in undergraduate courses. **Conclusion:** However, it is expected that the present study can contribute to the debates on the subject in the area of Information Science and reflect on the influence of literary reading for a more humanistic and empathic formation of the school librarian.

### KEYWORDS

Literary reading. Professional performance. School librarian. Reading practices.

## Formação humanista o papel da leitura literária na atuação do bibliotecário escolar

### RESUMO

**Introdução:** A leitura literária é considerada uma das atividades mais pertinentes para o aperfeiçoamento de habilidades interpessoais, como a empatia, tida como essencial na realização das funções do bibliotecário escolar. **Objetivo:** Dessa forma, o presente estudo objetiva discorrer sobre a maneira como a prática da leitura literária pode influenciar na atuação do bibliotecário escolar a partir da perspectiva apresentada pelo autor Carlos Ruiz Zafón no enredo de sua obra *A Sombra do Vento*. **Método:** Quanto aos procedimentos metodológicos, trata-se de uma pesquisa de natureza qualitativa, que teve como método científico o uso da pesquisa bibliográfica e do questionário como instrumento de coleta de dados. **Resultado:** Os resultados demonstram que os bibliotecários têm consciência da importância da leitura literária para a realização de suas atividades profissionais e para a construção de uma relação mais empática e humanista com os alunos, porém essa prática não costuma ser discutida com frequência nas pesquisas da área e incentivada nos cursos de graduação. **Conclusão:** Contudo, espera-se que o presente estudo

possa contribuir para os debates acerca da temática na área da Ciência da Informação e refletir sobre a influência da leitura literária para uma formação mais humanista e empática do bibliotecário escolar.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Leitura literária. Atuação profissional. Bibliotecário escolar. Práticas de leitura.



**JITA:** CF. Reading and story telling

## 1 INTRODUCTION

*Books are mirrors: we can only see in them what we possess inside.*

*Julián Carax (ZAFÓN, Carlos Ruiz).*

The school library is seen as a dynamic center of information, democratization of knowledge and comprehensive education, and the professional who works in it is responsible for developing actions that contribute to this goal. However, for this mediation process to occur satisfactorily, it is necessary that the school librarian not only improves the technical skills coming from the profession, but also observes how his or her behavior influences the relationship he or she establishes with the students.

According to Kidd and Castano (2013), "cultural practices ... can promote and refine interpersonal sensitivity throughout our lives. One such practice is reading fiction." Thus, literary reading is classified as one of the most appropriate activities for the improvement of interpersonal skills, since "it has characteristics that simulate reality and puts the reader in situations that make him reflect from the perspective of the other" (ORNELLAS; ALENCAR, 2015, p. 1).

Zaffón (2007), in his book *A Sombra do Vento*, through an engaging narrative, brings to the reader attributes that are worked through the practice of literary reading and that are mentioned by the scientific literature and studies on the subject. Thus, this study aims to discuss how the practice of literary reading can influence the school librarian's work according to the conceptions of reading presented in Zafón's book. These conceptions are also shared by authors such as Freire and Almeida Júnior, who support the construction of knowledge in the relationship/interaction with the world. "I also advocate and defend that, more and before anything, we read to know the world, the others, to understand ourselves; more and before anything, reading helps us in our endless search for the human, for ethics, for citizenship" (ALMEIDA JÚNIOR, 2021, p. 4).

In several passages of the plot of *The Shadow of the Wind*, Zafón explains, through the speeches and behavior of the characters, how literary reading can have an impact on the relationship of each subject with the outside world.

I once heard a regular customer at my father's bookstore remark that few things mark a reader as much as the first book that really opens the way to his or her heart. The first images, the echo of those words that we think we have left behind, accompany us throughout our lives and carve a palace in our memory to which sooner or later - no matter what books we read, what worlds we discover, how much we learn or forget - we will return. (ZAFÓN, 2007, p. 11).

Bearing in mind, then, that literature exerts influence on the way subjects develop and relate to the people around them, the practice of literary reading by the school librarian is also shown to be a method of continuing education, since it helps to build a more humanized and empathetic relationship with students.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

*Talk is for fools; silence is for cowards; listening is for the wise.*

*Barceló (ZAFÓN, Carlos Ruiz).*

As for the methodological procedures, this is a qualitative research, which had as scientific method the use of bibliographic research and the questionnaire as a tool for data collection.

The questionnaire was applied by means of an electronic form sent by e-mail to a group of 74 librarians who are part of a network of Libraries in the State of São Paulo and obtained 35 replies.

The literature survey pointed to a significant number of researches which discuss the importance/influence of the library/librarian for the formation of readers and the construction of knowledge. However, researches that address this subject and how this practice can interfere in their relationship with the student are still little discussed in the area.

Witter (1986, p. 33) links this scenario to the context of the school librarian, saying that "The psychological aspects involved in the relationship between librarian and user are complex, varied and possibly, for this reason, insufficiently studied.

In order to highlight how the practice of literary reading is portrayed in Zafón's work, a search was also conducted in its digital version, to get a sense of the recurrence of terms associated with the literary universe, whose results will be evidenced in the specific section.

Moreover, this research is intended to contribute to the debate about the topic and reflect on the influence of literary reading for a more humanistic and empathetic training of school librarians.

### 3 LITERARY READING AND LIBRARIANSHIP

*"The art of reading is dying very slowly, that it is an intimate ritual, that a book is a mirror and we can only find in it what we carry within us, that we put our mind and soul into reading, and that these goods are getting scarcer every day"*

*Bea (ZAFÓN, Carlos Ruiz).*

Literary reading consists of the practice of reading books and/or texts of narrative genres such as novels, short stories, poetry, chronicles, suspense, comics, among others. "Apart from its literary and discursive structure, it presents itself as an approach to the other and the outside world through its stories, providing a balanced development of the intellect and emotions" (ORNELLAS; ALENCAR, 2015, p. 4).

According to Candido (2004, p. 172), literary reading has a direct action in the formation of subjects, given that

may be a conscious acquisition of notions, emotions, suggestions, inculcations, but for the most part it takes place in the layers of the subconscious and the unconscious, incorporating itself in depth as an enrichment that is difficult to evaluate. Literary productions, of all types and all levels, satisfy basic human needs, above all through this incorporation that enriches our perception and our view of the world. (CANDIDO, 2004, p. 172).

Regardless of what time and what its use is dedicated to, literary reading always preserves its changing character, and it is in this authentic power that its greatest prestige lies.

Because reading is an activity that relies on the reader filling in the gaps in his text, it relies on imagination to be fully realized. For this reason, it cannot be completely controlled or induced and that is why literary reading can be considered the best way to develop ourselves critically (ORNELLAS, 2014, p. 51).

Although reading is a solitary activity, it can generate expressive consequences that stand out socially, as it ensures that the reader broadens his or her ability to see and behave in the world. In Freire's (2011, p. 30) words, "reading the word is not only preceded by reading the world, but by a certain way of 'writing' or 'rewriting' it, that is, of transforming it through our conscious practice.

Petit (2009), for his part, argues that literature consents an approximation of us to the other and, therefore, provokes the art of inhabiting, familiarizing us with the outside, making it possible to cross walls and partitions so that we place ourselves close to others, less indifferent. In other words, "literary reading is an approximation of the other and the external world, configuring itself as a human need to have contact with stories and a balanced development of the intellect and emotions" (ORNELLAS, 2014, p. 64).

Tracing a brief contextualization about the work used here as a basis, *The Shadow of the Wind*, by Spanish author Carlos Ruiz Zafón (graduated in Information Sciences), was the first of a series of four books (tetralogy) written by the author and called "The Cemetery of Forgotten Books". Published in 2001, the book was a literary sensation, with translations made into about 50 languages and millions of copies sold around the world.

In 2016, the year the last book in the series, *The Labyrinth of Spirits*, was released, the author was asked why he never let himself be seduced and accepted the invitation to adapt the saga to the movies, to which he replied, "For me, these books are a tribute to literature, to the written word. It would be a betrayal to turn them into works for the cinema or for television" (ZAFÓN, 2016). The author also emphasizes the feeling when delivering the tetralogy to the reader:

These are books from my own world, talking about writing and reading. I wanted to explore the creative process of the act of telling a story, and it allowed me to understand many things about myself. I don't know if I am wiser, but I feel at peace with myself (ZAFÓN, 2016).

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In *The Shadow of the Wind*, Zafón conveys to the reader what scientific literature and studies on this topic allude to as a characteristic of the practice of literary reading. In the plot that unfolds around the work, the author manages to manifest that literature is the exercise of the written word and that it provides readers with the opportunity to disassociate themselves from their comfortable worlds.

This is a suspense thriller set in post-civil war Barcelona. The construction of the narrative occurs through the relationship that the characters create with reading. Daniel Sempere (the protagonist), seduced by the reading of a manuscript, tries to unravel the mysteries that surround the author of the book (Júlian Carax) and, during the course of the novel, as he solves the enigmas, he realizes he is so involved that his personal life begins to take a similar course to that of the author.

In the book, Mr. Sempere, when introducing the Cemetery of the Forgotten Books to his son Daniel, describes the environment with all the representativeness and meanings that a library and the books it houses can reproduce in a reader's universe.

This place is a mystery, Daniel, a sanctuary. Every book, every volume you see, has a soul. The soul of the person who wrote it, and the soul of those who read it, who lived and dreamed with it. Every time a book changes hands, every time someone looks through its pages, its spirit grows and the person is strengthened. It has been many years since my father first brought me here, and this place was already old. Almost as old as the town itself. Nobody knows for sure how long it has existed or who created it. I will tell you what my father told me. When a library disappears, when a bookstore closes its doors, when a book is lost in oblivion, we, the guardians, the

ones who know this place, make sure that it comes here. In this place, the books that no one remembers anymore, the books that have been lost in time, will live forever, hoping to someday reach the hands of a new reader, a new spirit. In the store, we sell and buy them, but in truth the books have no owner. Every book you see here has been a man's best friend. (ZAFÓN, 2007, p. 9).

When Daniel is presented with the possibility of selecting a book from that place, he chooses an unknown copy, by an author who is also unknown. As he reads, Daniel is so fascinated that he becomes curious to know more about that author and his work, and this is how the story develops.

Information generates doubts and conflict and awakens interests from people's relationship with the external. Reading is at the core of the appropriation of information. In the words of Almeida Junior (2021, p. 2),

The library is the great, the immense arena where ideas, conceptions, ways of understanding the world are fought out. It enables and encourages this struggle. There is no silent battle. When I read, I fight with ideas, with thoughts. I argue with the absent and often unknown author. I present my arguments to myself and become the judge of the truths that result from this confrontation. My knowledge is confronted with the new and is transformed, even against my will.

In turn, literature is an indispensable factor of humanization, vital to their inner and subjective survival, because it "humanizes everyone, that is, allows feelings to pass from the state of mere emotion to the constructed form, which ensures generality and permanence" (CANDIDO, 2004, p. 179).

In view of this, the practice of literary reading goes beyond an entertainment activity and the search for knowledge, but it is also a means of personal and professional qualification, capable of providing opportunities for development as social subjects. Therefore, literary reading contributes to the optimization of personal relationships between school librarian and student, since it is exposed as a determining principle for the formation of empathy skills (ORNELLAS; ALENCAR, 2015, p. 3).

We can say that literature is the waking dream of civilizations. Therefore, just as there can be no psychic equilibrium without the dream during sleep, perhaps there can be no social equilibrium without literature. Thus, it is an indispensable factor in humanization and, as such, it confirms man in his humanity, also because it acts largely in the subconscious and unconscious. In this sense, it can have an importance equivalent to that of conscious forms of intentional inculcation, such as family, group or school education. Each society creates the fictional, poetic and dramatic manifestations according to its impulses, its beliefs, its feelings, its norms, in order to strengthen in each one their presence and action (CÂNDIDO, 2004, p. 175).

Goleman (2012) asserts that the ability to understand other people is a capability of interpersonal intelligence that enables one to understand what motivates them: "the core of interpersonal intelligence includes the ability to discern and respond appropriately to other people's moods, temperaments, motivations, and desires" (p. 63).

This understanding is tied to the concept of empathy, which, according to the author, is a personal competence essential to human interactions: "Empathic people are more attuned to the subtle signals from the outside world that indicate what others need or want. This makes them good professionals in the caregiving field, in teaching, in sales and administration" (GOLEMAN, 2012, p. 67).

Therefore, empathic ability is fundamental for professionals who, like librarians, have a direct interaction activity and need to assimilate different attitudes, respecting the diversity of people without overriding their values or manifesting prejudices.

The American Library Association (ALA) recommends some primary requirements in the performance of librarians, which must be observed to achieve a positive perception in the relationship with users: 1- **Visibility/accessibility:** it is substantial that the librarian is accessible. The librarian's initial response "sets the tone for the entire communication process, and influences the depth and level of interaction"; 2- **Interest:** "Librarians who demonstrate a high level of interest in user demands will generate a higher level of satisfaction"; 3- **Ability to listen and question:** "Effective listening and questioning skills are necessary for positive interaction"; 4- **Investigate:** "Many aspects of the search, which lead to accurate results depend on the librarian's behavior"; 5- **Follow up:** The librarian should observe whether the result of the approach met the user's need (AMERICAN, 2004).

All these requirements involve behavioral predicates that, in a way, are linked to the concept of empathy, presented here as an indispensable skill to achieve success in the interaction relationships between the school librarian and its educational community.

The librarian stands out for, among others, performing the function of making technically organized information available to his community in order to act as a collaborator in the construction of knowledge within society. For this, not only is effective technical mastery necessary, but also the ability to relate in an empathetic way, since achieving the objective of their function will depend, to a large extent, on their attitude and attitude towards the user. Therefore, this professional should not only prioritize the development of technical skills that guide his work, but also the social and human skills that influence the development of his relationship with the user. (ORNELLAS, 2014, p. 13).

The Brazilian Classification of Occupations (CBO) brings a series of personal skills that should be exercised by the librarian in his or her work. Within this list, there are not only technical skills, but also emotional ones, as mentioned in the list instituted by the participants of the CBO description of the librarian occupation 1- Keep up to date; 2- Lead teams; 3- Work in teams and network; 4- Demonstrate capacity for analysis and synthesis; 5- Demonstrate knowledge of other languages; 6- Demonstrate communication skills; 7- Demonstrate negotiation skills; 8- Act ethically; 9- Demonstrate a sense of organization; 10- Demonstrate entrepreneurial skills; 11- Demonstrate logical reasoning; 12- Demonstrate the ability to concentrate; 13- Demonstrate proactivity; 14- Demonstrate creativity (CBO, 2021).

Emotional competencies, such as empathy and communication and negotiation skills, are skills that can be developed and trained. In this process, literary reading is a practice that can help in the search for the improvement of these social skills. About the influence of literary reading on human relations, Calvino (1990, p. 103) states: "My confidence in the future of literature consists in knowing that there are things that only literature with its specific means can give us.

Nevertheless, it is possible to say that literary reading is also a continuing education activity that makes it possible to increase subjects' ability to empathize. Consequently, it is seen as crucial for school librarians, since they should always try to improve their social skills in the search for a more humanistic interaction with the academic community.

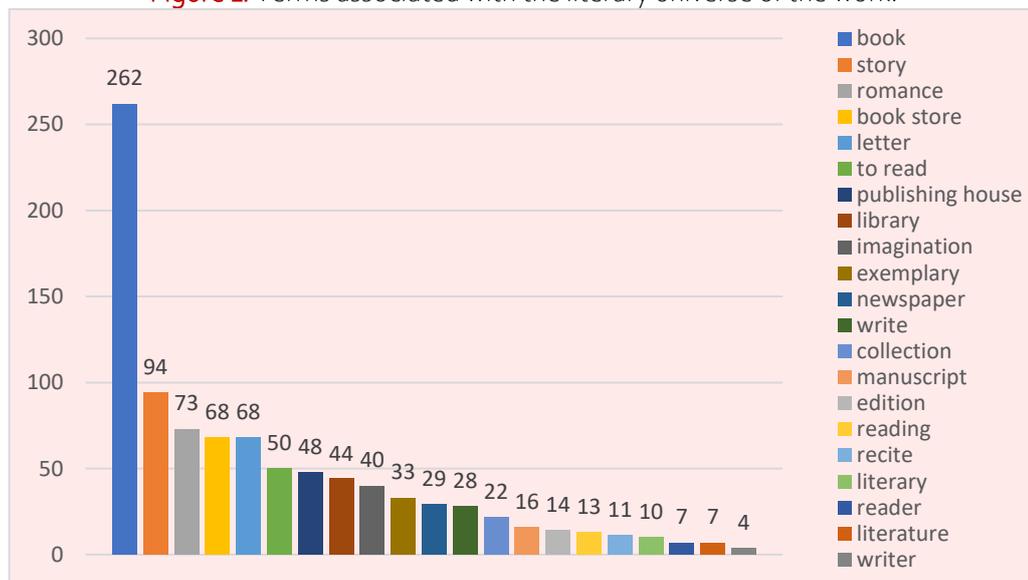
## 4 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESULTS

*"I grew up among books, making invisible friends on pages that crumbled to dust  
 whose scent I still hold in my hands"*

Daniel Sempere (ZAFÓN, Carlos Ruiz).

Each reading is unique. The words are mutant, they are especially dependent on each reader and the moment he or she experiences (ALMEIDA JÚNIOR, 2021). In order to highlight how the practice of literary reading is portrayed in the plot of *A Sombra do Vento*, we conducted a survey in the digital version of the work to raise the frequency with which the author uses terms associated with the literary universe for the construction of his narrative.

Figure 1: Terms associated with the literary universe of the work.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on Zafón (2007).

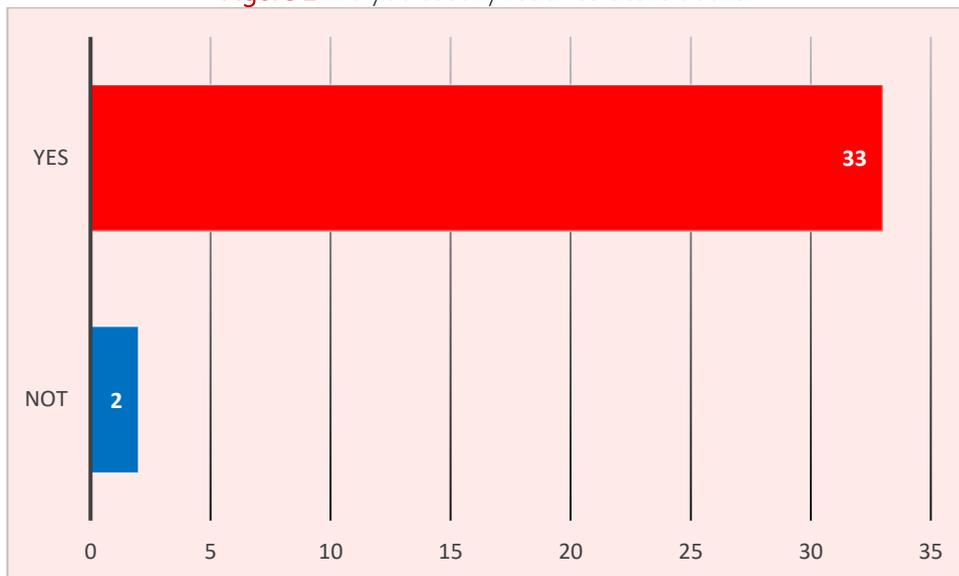
As illustrated in Figure 1, the recurrence with which the author uses these words is significant and expresses their importance in the construction of a narrative that aims to pay homage to literature. In the words of Zafón himself

With this series I wanted to pay homage to literature of all genres. In the game of literary references there are many influences to many works, like *Alice in Wonderland* and other more obscure ones that also cross the other books and are more or less apprehended depending on the reader's background. There are several possible layers. Each reader will find different references. It is a game where you can enter or not; you can pass by and not see any reference and still apprehend the story (ZAFÓN, 2017).

In addition to this survey, data was also collected through a questionnaire, which was composed of a total of 7 closed questions and sent to a group of librarians who work in a library network in the state of São Paulo. The purpose of this instrument was to identify the practice of literary reading among the professionals of the network, aiming to know how they understand the relationship of literary reading with the daily practice and how it can influence the relationship they establish with the students. An attempt to observe whether the practice of a certain group of professionals working in the educational area is aligned with what was identified in the bibliographic studies.

The survey obtained feedback from 35 participants, and the answers will be briefly discussed, as shown in the figures below:

Figure 2: Do you usually read literature books?



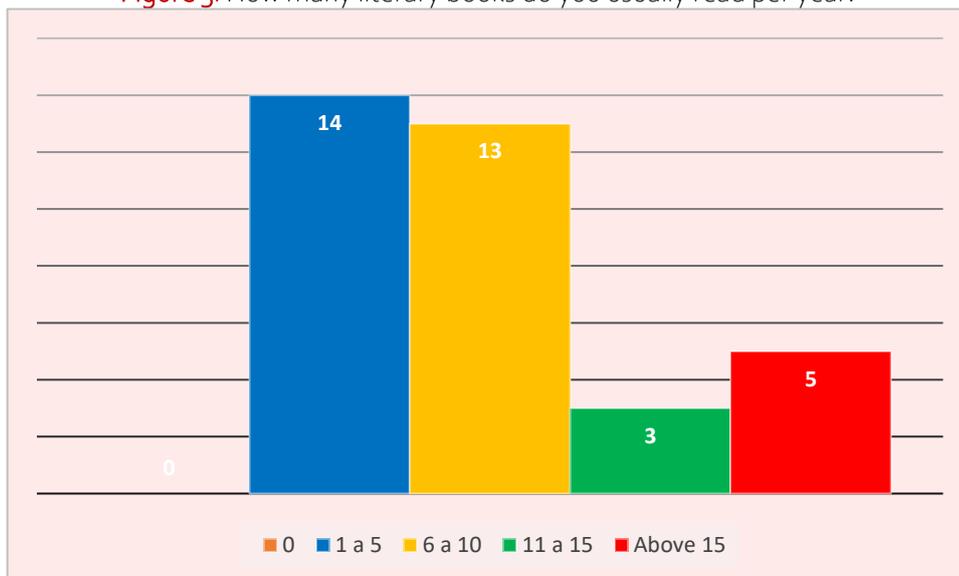
Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

Question #1 shows that most participants have the habit of reading literary books (94.3%), which is highly recommended by researchers for the development of skills such as empathy, essential for a good relationship with students.

When we read about the most varied stories, in different contexts and situations, we are led to face feelings, sensations and reflections from the other's point of view and, by thinking as if we were outside our body, our conditioning and social context and were this other - the character -, we may have the ability to identify how the other thinks and feels and, thus, become more human, understanding and tolerant. (ORNELLAS; ALENCAR, 2015, p.6).

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Figure 3: How many literary books do you usually read per year?

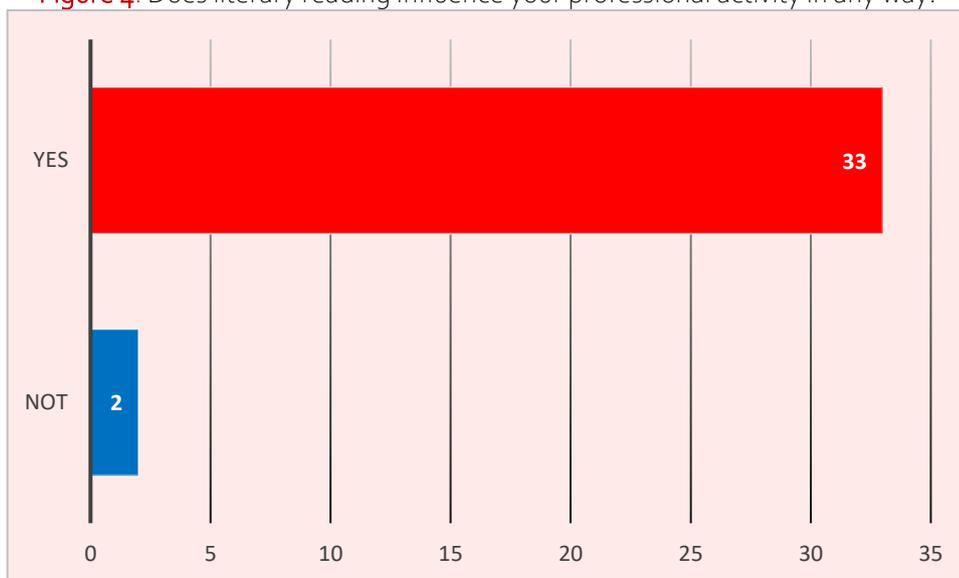


Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

Question #2 makes it explicit that, although most claim to read literary books, the amount read per year is not very high. A large part (40%) of librarians said they read from 1 to 5 books of literature during the year.

On the other hand, according to the 5th edition of the survey Retratos da Leitura (Portraits of Reading), the average number of books that are read per year in the Southeast region is 4.9 (INSTITUTE, 2021, p. 41). Thus, a good part of the subjects usually read, which can be considered above average, since 13 (37.1%) selected the option from 6 to 10, 3 (8.6%) stated they read from 11 to 15, and 5 (14.3%) said they read more than 15 books a year.

Figure 4: Does literary reading influence your professional activity in any way?



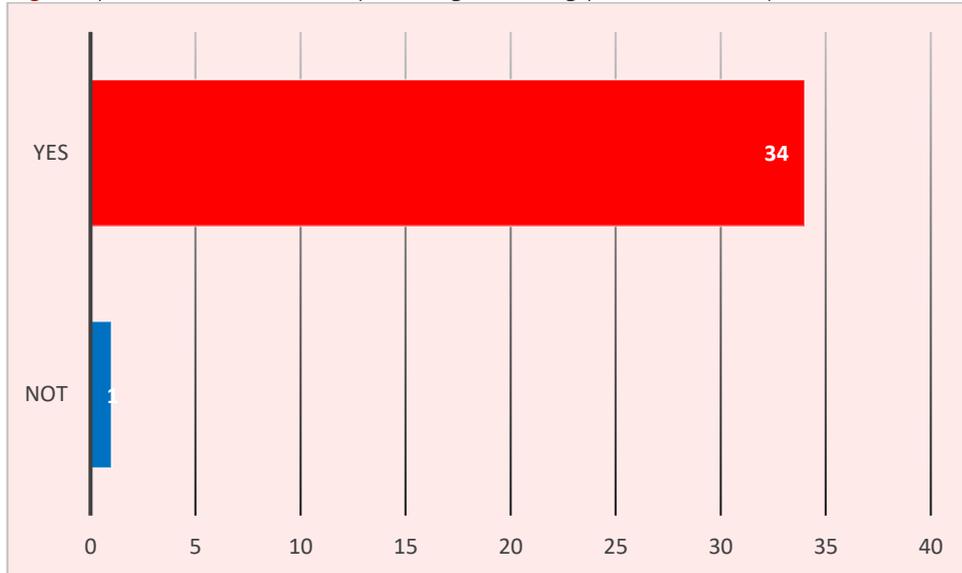
Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

Question #3 reveals that the large number (94.3%) of respondents believe that literary reading can exert influence on their professional activity. This perspective can be confirmed in the research of Ornellas (2014, p. 11), who clarifies:

Considering that literature apparently has an influence on the development of subjects, the librarian's training as a literary reader presents itself as a form of continuing education that can help build a relationship with the user.

The results pointed out in Ornellas' (2014) research also complement the response that librarians presented in question #4, which deals with the ability to approach literary reading in their relationship with students, as follows:

Figure 5: Do you believe that literary reading can bring your relationship with students closer?

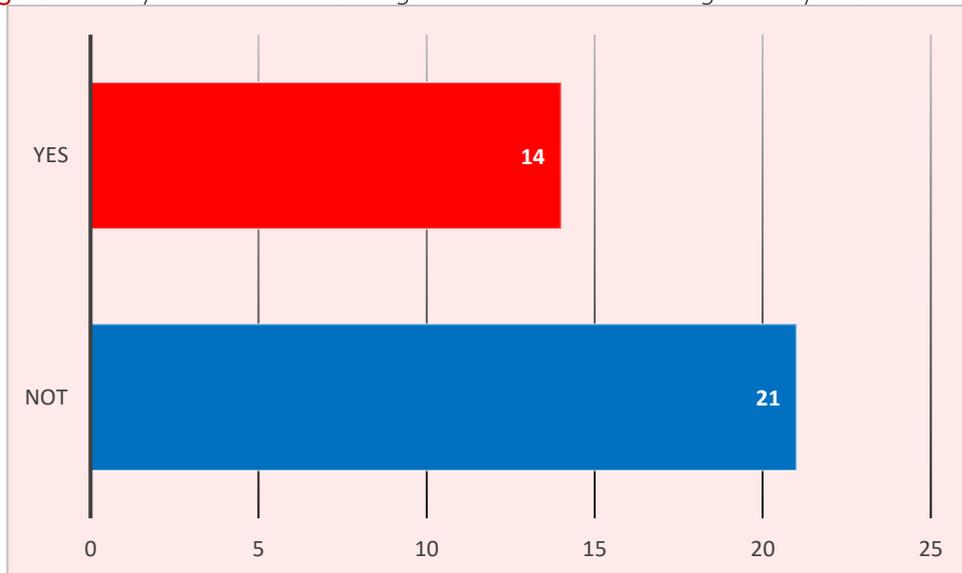


Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

Question 4 also demonstrates the awareness that librarians have about the practice of literary reading, since the affirmative answer received almost unanimously (97.1%) when it comes to the influence that literary reading exerts in building a close relationship with students.

Inazawa and Baptista (2012) describe this relationship as a conversational competence, which, for them, is a skill developed by literary reading that enables the subject "the use of communication through knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, with the purpose of increasing understanding and cooperation among individuals" (INAZAWA; BAPTISTA, 2012, p. 118).

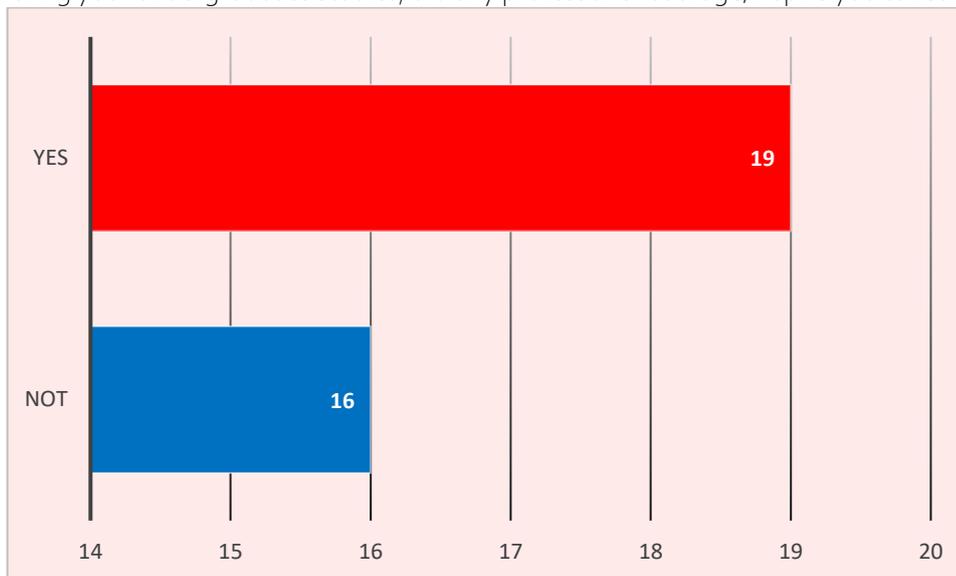
Figure 6: Was your interest in reading a motivation for choosing a library science course?



Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

The purpose of question 5 was to link the choice of the Librarianship course to the fact that the subjects were interested in reading. However, demystifying the common sense enunciation, this relationship could not be proven, since 21 (60%) of the respondents said that the interest for reading was not a motivation for choosing the course.

Figure 7: During your undergraduate studies, did any professor encourage/inspire you to read literature?



Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

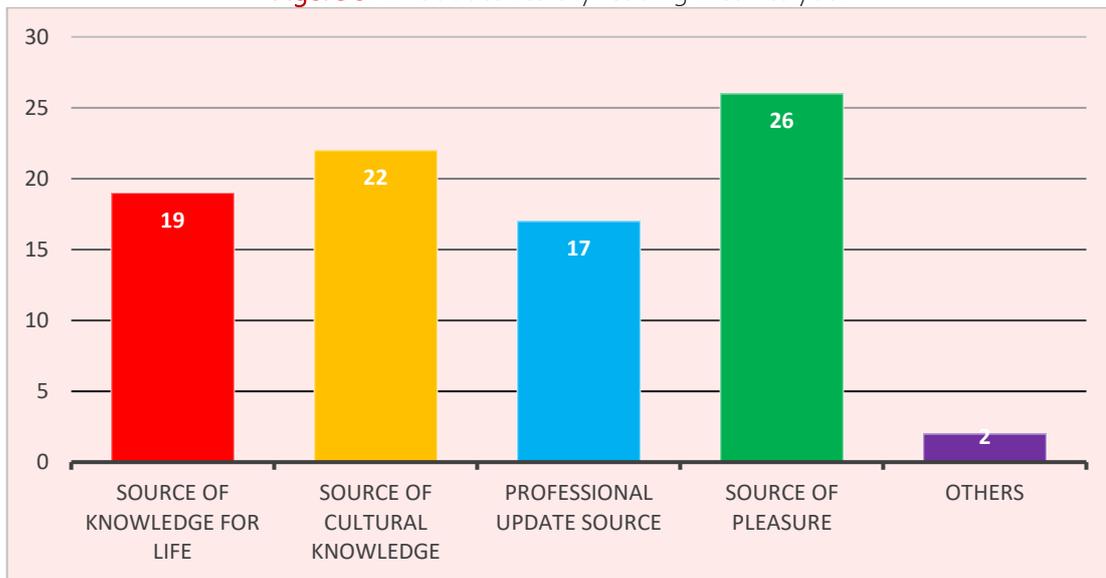
Question #6 was designed with the intention of revealing whether during their graduation/training, teachers used to encourage them to read literary books. The result elucidates that most (54.3%) of the subjects claimed to be encouraged by a teacher. In this context, Carvalho (2005, p.67) comments that

Some people develop a taste for reading by the example of family members, others by the influence of teachers or by chance circumstances in their life stories. However, the formation of readers on a large scale, via the school, will only happen if there is a reading policy, translated into the appropriate training of reading teachers, the abundant supply of good and varied written materials, and the installation of well-equipped libraries and reading rooms, energized by librarians.

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Encouraging the practice of literary reading is fundamental to the training of any professional, since it contributes to the development of relevant skills in human interactions. It is about reading beyond the eyes, or, as Paulo Freire highlights, "reading the world"

Figure 8: What does literary reading mean to you?



Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

Question 7 allowed the selection of more than one option, so a good part of the respondents chose more than one alternative, thus highlighting the importance of literary reading as a Source of pleasure (26), as a Source of cultural knowledge (22), as a Source of knowledge for life (19) and as a Source of professional updating (17), respectively.

Of the 35 librarians who participated in the survey, only 2 decided to use the alternative other, and the answers given by them were:

*Subject 1: I believe it means a source of cultural and historical knowledge and also a source of pleasure. I should read more than I do. It is a great opportunity to approach and culture of reading with the students.*

*Subject 2: Possibility of understanding and reflection about life and the facets of the human being.*

However, the data collection could confirm that the group of participating librarians are aware of how the practice of literary reading can positively influence their professional activity, as well as the interpersonal relationship they have with students.

However, as the purpose of this study was to discuss how the practice of literary reading can influence the school librarian's work according to the conceptions of reading presented in the book *The Shadow of the Wind*, the questions sent to the group were intended to complement what the literature divulges about the relationship of reading with the construction of skills and the humanistic training of this professional. That said, the questions applied did not intend to identify the influence of this practice in the daily activities of the library network investigated, thus opening up possibilities for a future survey and studies in the area.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

*"I did not know the pleasure of reading, of exploring doors that open in our soul, of abandoning ourselves to the imagination, the beauty and mystery of fiction and language"*

*Clara (ZAFÓN, Carlos Ruiz).*

The study reveals the need for school librarians to interact empathetically with students, seeking to understand their attitudes and values to meet their demands in a more humanized manner, applying behavioral, and not only technical, skills in their relationships.

Empathy is one of the skills that help in the humanistic formation of this professional, as it is inherent to the human being and can be exercised as well as diminished throughout the process of socialization and culture. Among the activities that can collaborate to the promotion of empathy, the practice of literary reading stands out.

Literary reading allows us to simulate reality and place the reader in different situations and perspectives that are part of the other's universe. Through the narrative of events and feelings that involve the characters, it enables reflection and knowledge from the point of view of different people. This experience favors the perception of the world and of the other, which contributes to the development of empathy.

Thus, the practice of literary reading was proposed as an activity that favors the promotion of subjective and humanizing characteristics essential to the improvement of empathy skills. Although this is a preliminary research, the data express that the librarians who were willing to participate in the study conduct literary reading in their daily lives and are aware of the influence/importance that this action has in the performance of their professional activities and in building a more empathetic and humanistic relationship with students, but this practice is not often discussed in research in the area or encouraged in undergraduate courses.

However, we hope that this study can contribute to the debates on the subject in the field of Information Science and reflect on the influence of literary reading for a more humanistic and empathetic education of school librarians.

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## CRediT

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